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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8297
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0562
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0500
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 2105
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0910
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0578
RUEHPG/AMEMBASSY PRAGUE 0135
RHMFIS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RHMFIS/COMSOEUR VAIHINGEN GE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0591
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1019

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000250

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM KPAO KDEM ASEC MR

SUBJECT: ANTI-COUP PROTESTS IN NOUAKCHOTT VIOLENTLY
DISPERSED BY POLICE, LEADING TO SEVERAL INJURIES

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 230

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Two anti-coup protests in Nouakchott were violently dispersed by police on April 2 and April 3. In both cases, police used tear gas and batons to break up the protests, injuring several people in the process. EmbOffs obtained first-hand accounts from some prominent figures who participated in the marches. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The first march: On April 2, hundreds of anti-coup activists attempted to march from UNAD party headquarters to Capital Stadium. The marchers included several prominent FNDD figures, such as National Assembly President Messaoud Ould Boulkheir, UFP President Mohamed Ould Maouloud, and Tawassoul President Jemil Ould Mansour. The police violently suppressed the march, using tear gas and truncheons to disperse the marchers. Several people, including Boulkheir, suffered temporary asphyxiation from tear gas. Others were beaten severely; for example, UFP parliamentarian Kebad Ould Cheikh N'Deye suffered a broken arm. The number of people injured in the clashes was difficult to determine; media outlets cited at least 7 people, though the actual number was probably higher. There was a small RFD presence at the march, and President Abdallahi released a communique April 3 condemning the violent suppression of the marchers.

¶3. (SBU) The second march: On April 3, several female FNDD activists attempted to march outside of APP party headquarters and head downtown. (Note: APP currently holds the rotating presidency of the FNDD. End note.) They were also dispersed violently by the police, who used tear gas and batons to disperse the women. Comment: Though this protest was on a much smaller scale than that of the April 2 march, it shows that the Mauritanian security services will not hesitate to break up anti-coup demonstrations, even those involving women. End comment.

¶4. (C) Messaoud targeted: PAO, PolOff and PolAsst met with Boubacar Ould Messaoud March 5 at his residence. Messaoud is President of SOS Esclaves, and probably Mauritania's most prominent human rights and anti-slavery activist. Messaoud stated that he was singled out by the police and severely beaten. Specifically, Messaoud named Commissar Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Nejib as the leader behind the targeted attack.

(Note: The Commissar named "Nagy" who is mentioned in Reftel, para 2 is most likely an error. It is believed Ould NEJIB is the Commissar at work in both instances, in which case he is behind much of the alleged ground-level intimidation of anti-coup forces. RSO FSNI states that Ould Nejib is a Commissar in the anti-riot police. End note.) Messaoud joined the march, wearing his trademark beret, which made him easily recognizable. Three or four policemen, directed by Ould Nejib, rushed towards him, whereupon he raised his arms to show he meant no harm. He was struck on the nape of the neck by one of the policemen (he didn't see which one), whereupon he lost consciousness and fell to the ground. He stated that the police then tried to load him into the trunk of a Mercedes. Fortunately, two women recognized him and started shouting his name to attract the crowd. They flagged down a car, and he regained consciousness on the ride back to his house. Tests done the next day showed he had no fractures, and he was going to a neurologist the afternoon of March 5 for further tests. However, his pre-existing back problems had been aggravated by the episode, and he was still aching in several places. He stated that he would file a formal complaint to the authorities regarding his treatment, because it was "his right" and a matter of principle. He also asserted that the junta's new strategy for dealing with anti-coup demonstrators was to dispense with arresting anybody, and just beat them instead.

15. (C) Associates of Messaoud: While EmbOffs were at Messaoud's residence, two of his associates stopped by, one

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of whom had also received blows at the April 2 FNDD march. Doctor/Ophthalmologist Ahmed Salem Ould Ndary stated that he was not near Messaoud when he was kicked by the police; rather he was far away in the crowd. He consented to having pictures taken that showed a large bruise on the right side of his back (see [http://diplopedia.state.sgov.gov/index.php?title=Image:Ndary back 1.jpg](http://diplopedia.state.sgov.gov/index.php?title=Image:Ndary%20back%201.jpg) and [http://diplopedia.state.sgov.gov/index.php?title=Image:Ndary back 2.jpg](http://diplopedia.state.sgov.gov/index.php?title=Image:Ndary%20back%202.jpg)). Comment: If Ndary's account is true, this implies that the police's use of force was not a limited occurrence during the march. End comment.

16. (C) Maouloud's experience: Charge visited March 5 with FNDD co-leader and UFP President Mohamed Ould Maouloud. Ould Maouloud said the vast majority of the police had acted responsibly despite what he understood to be instructions to be tough. He suggested, "most looked for the slightest reason to disengage." That said, he saw that some smaller police elements were being egged on to take strong action. At the head of the march on April 2, he said there were 4 separate police cordons put in front of them. The first three dissolved away as they approached but the fourth, about 800 meters from the start point. At that point, Ould Maouloud said he saw a police officer "aim a tear gas grenade gun straight at Ould Boulkheir" suggesting he was being specifically targetted. Noting that Ould Boulkheir was already weakened by the tear gas, Ould Maouloud said they put him in a vehicle to get him out of the area but that police started stoning the care, "fully aware the President of the National Assembly" was in the car.

HANKINS